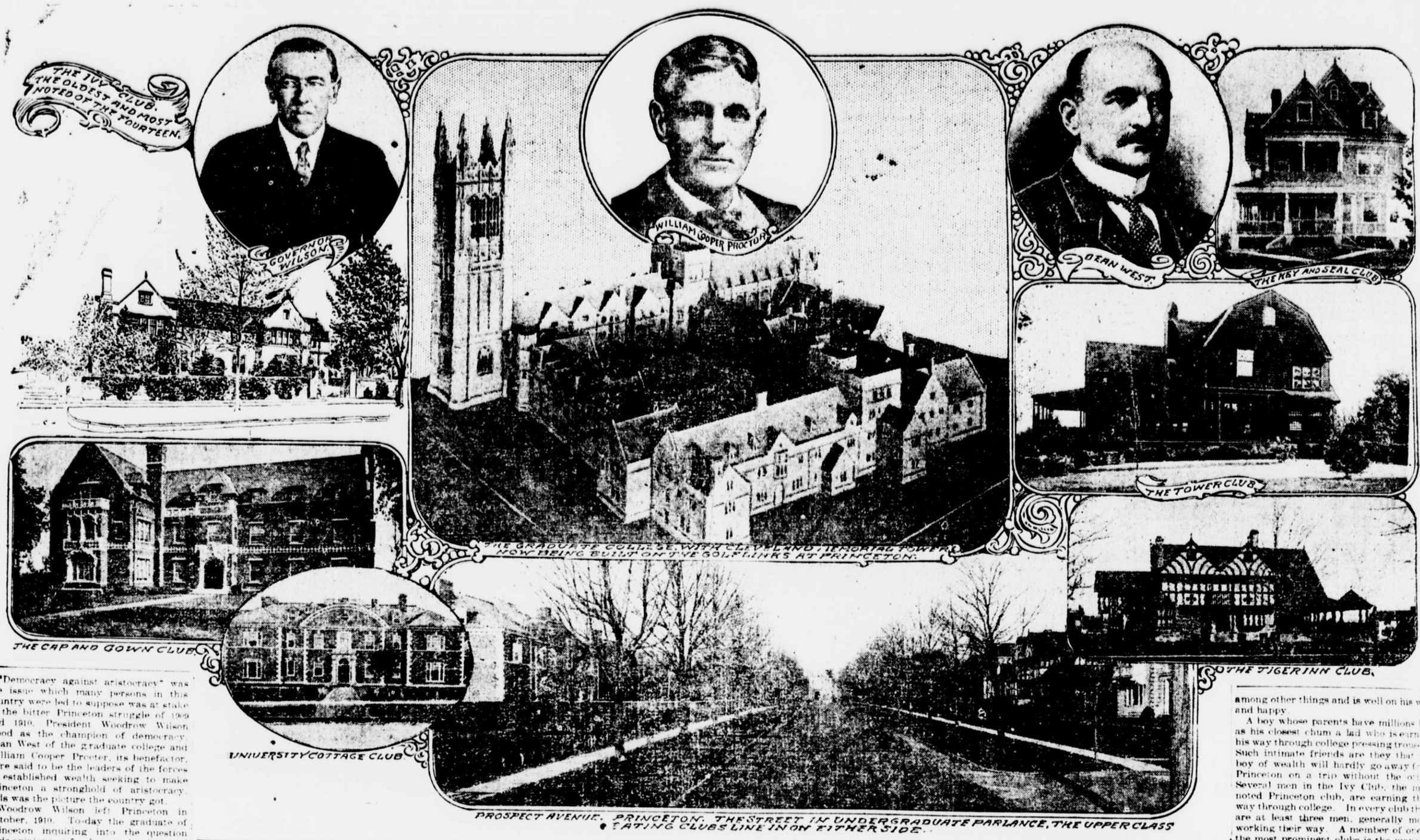
WOODROW WILSON'S CONTROVERSY WITH DEAN WEST

Story of the Dispute Over the Graduate College Plan Which Led to the Break in the Princeton Faculty in 1910.



"Democracy against aristocracy" was the issue which many persons in this country were led to suppose was at stake in the bitter Princeton struggle of 1909 and 1910. President Woodrow Wilson stood as the champion of democracy. Dean West of the graduate college and William Cooper Procter, its benefactor, were said to be the leaders of the forces of established wealth seeking to make Princeton a stronghold of aristocracy. This was the picture the country got.

Woodrow Wilson left Princeton in October, 1910. To-day the graduate of Princeton inquiring into the question finds opinions on fundamentals advocated by men on both sides that almost touch. He naturally concludes that there were no great fundamentals at issue.

It was not democracy, it was personality; it was Dr. Wilson against Dean West: this is what the inquiring graduate will tell you. Then he will explain.

The issue in the first battle of the fight, that over President Wilson's "quad" system, his plan to divide Princeton into residential quadrangles where undergraduates were to be assigned to lodge and dine by university authority—the issue here was not the "quad" system or aristocracy. There were means other than the "quad" system which in the opinion of strong admirers of President Wilson as well as his opponents could remedy the faults of the eating club social system, which the "quad" system proposed to abolish. Democracy in the opinion of many Princetonians, earnest commoners, was to be retained and fostered in Princeton by many less radical measures than "quads." The "quad" system was denounced as destructive of individual student liberty.

The issue in the second battle, the main struggle over the graduate college, was not, as it was sometimes made out to be, "Place the residential college of graduates on the campus among the undergraduates and get democracy; or choose aristocracy by putting it on the golf links." Democracy had nothing to do with this question, skilled educators will tell you, for you can put the graduate student the world over in the midst of undergraduates and his life and thought will by nature draw him apart from them. He must be out of undergraduate life, because he has passed to a new stage. Democracy was an artificially injected issue, in the opinion of many graduates at present.

The plan for the graduate college at Princeton was first proposed by Dean West in 1896. It was his great idea to which he had determined to devote his life's energy. Where had the idea, so long cherished, finally shaped itself in detailed and definite form?

In Paris is the Ecole Normal, where not more than a hundred men meet in scholarly pursuits. Though almost insignificant in size, it had given the world men who have influenced its life more than many a great university. From it had come the most brilliant names in French science, as Laplace, Lagrange, Pasteur, in philosophy Cousin, in history Michelet, in criticism Renan, in literature Brunetière, besides eminent statesmen and diplomats. In this school men of brilliant minds brought together their thought along varied lines, at once stimulated and stimulating. Dean West went to Cambridge. Said his host, the master of Trinity, "Do you know who lived as students in that one little entry hard by the great tower? They were Sir Isaac Newton, Lord Macaulay, Alfred Tennyson and Thackeray." And with such examples in his mind Dean West said that there could be in America a residential college to develop men along like lines, and its place was to be at Princeton. America had nothing like it.

Graduate students in America scattered about great universities in residence as they willed, had nothing of the contact of one mind skilled in science with another in philosophy or economics, which they would have when brought together in residence. Dean West drew out his plan to give them this contact. He would lift the graduate student out of the life in American boarding houses, living not in comfort or in happiness, largely alone and without comradeship. He would place the graduate student in residence with men of his own sympathies and thought, in an academic home at once dignified and comfortable, though far from luxury and extravagance.

The architecture of the buildings, their grace and nobility, the refinement of the life, should have their unconscious influence in making the student a finer man. Yet the life in this home should and would be simple, as indeed it would have to be on a weekly expenditure not averaging more than $9 for lodging, table, light heat and service, a figure at least as low as the expenses of the average Princeton undergraduate for the same things.

He would bring the graduate students in direct personal contact with the strongest faculty of eminent men thoroughly equipped to give graduate courses in their several departments that could be brought to Princeton. The gathering together of students in a place to meet and live with such men was the essential of the plan. The buildings, the material side, were only a means to bring this about. They became emphasized simply because the idea was new.

Plans for this graduate residential college were prepared by Dean West and published by the endowment committee appointed by the board of trustees as early as 1897 in a book commemorating the building plans of the sesquicentennial celebration. Each graduate was to have his own bedroom, study and bath. Provision was to be made for eighty students. There were to be a general dining hall, a breakfast room, besides a common room and a dean's residence. The proposed cost was to be about $600,000. These plans were approved by the trustees then.

In March, 1903, in the first year after Woodrow Wilson became president, the whole conception of the graduate college was embodied in a special report prepared by Dean West after a careful study of graduate schools abroad. This was done by the express authority of the trustees and with the cordial approval of President Wilson. President Wilson wrote the preface for this report, which he had revised in detail in manuscript. He styled the plan "admirable in every way," "the real means by which a group of graduate students are most apt to stimulate and set the pace for the whole university," a plan which would "give us a place of unique distinction among American universities."

Dean West then appeared before the board of trustees, explained the plan fully amid great applause, receiving the unanimous informal approval of the board. He was enthusiastically told to "go ahead and get the money for it."

The plan has since never been changed by Dean West and is the same in all important details to-day. Yet this same plan, when in 1909 and 1910 it was about to become a reality through the Swann, the Procter and allied contingent gifts, aggregating $1,250,000, and when it was about to add to the university the distinction predicted by President Wilson, suddenly became the focus point for sharp attack and detraction by President Wilson and those he influenced as a dangerous scheme to turn Princeton democracy into snobbish aristocracy.

In 1906 President Wilson pledged his support not only to the plan but also to Dean West as the man to carry it into operation according to Dean West's ideas, despite his subsequent repudiation of the plan and its sponsor. In the autumn of 1906 Dean West was considering very seriously the acceptance of the presidency of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which had been offered him. He had determined to go unless something definite was done to help the graduate college. He had been trying to push the college, but felt that he was receiving no real cooperation from President Wilson and was discouraged. He went to President Wilson and said he felt these things and also that President Wilson really did not care to have him stay.

A special meeting of the trustees' committee, of which ex-President Cleveland was chairman, was then called, and Dean West explained fully to the committee in the presence of President Wilson his opinion that the call to the other institution opened to him an honorable way of leaving Princeton in view of the fact that he had not "hit it off" with President Wilson. After deliberation the committee sent for Dean West, and then Mr. Cleveland as chairman informed him in behalf of the committee and President Wilson that he must remain and that a determined effort would be made for the graduate college, which would be "the next thing" taken up.

The next day, October 20, 1906, at the meeting of the board of trustees this resolution was passed and published:

Resolved, That the board learns with the utmost concern of the possibility that Prof. Andrew F. West may accept a call that would take him away from Princeton. The board would consider his loss quite irreparable. By his scholarship, by his ideals, by his fertility in constructive ideas he has made himself one of the chief ornaments and one of the most indispensable counsellors of the place. The board has particularly counted upon him to put into operation the graduate college, which he conceived and for which it has planned. It begs to assure him that he cannot be spared and that the board trusts that should he remain its hopes and his may be the sooner realized because of this additional proof of his devotion.

This resolution was written by President Wilson.

The issue of Dean West's voluntary withdrawal from Princeton on the one hand or his remaining there with the assurance that he could carry out his life work, the graduate college plan, had been frankly and clearly stated and settled. President Wilson and the board had decisively chosen Dean West and his plan and put themselves behind it. Dean West stayed on the good faith of this promise of President Wilson and the board.

The clear issue in his mind of the active promotion of the graduate college by President Wilson and the board as the basis of his remaining was shown in his letter in the *Princeton Alumni Weekly* November 10, 1906, in which he said:

> I have not asked nor have I been tendered any terms for remaining in Princeton beyond the cordial and unanimous assurances of the president and trustees that a renewed and determined effort will be made to secure the graduate college.

Once more, this time a month later, at the December meeting of the trustees in 1906, President Wilson placed himself on record as strongly in favor of Dean West's graduate college plan and its operation up to that time in Merwick, the graduate residence hall which had been on a small scale what the present graduate college is to be in the large, on exactly the same principle and basis. President Wilson offered congratulations that the expansion of the beginnings of the graduate college at Merwick, made possible by the Swann bequest shortly before announced, might be "so consistently combined, as first a model and then an auxiliary, with the great graduate college for whose erection and endowment we are so eagerly seeking funds."

He lauded the feature at Merwick of the community life of the graduate students, living together instead of being scattered through the town, and wrote: "Their close and constant contact with one another, their free life, their refined and agreeable environment have not only added greatly to their pleasure, but have brought, as we expected, a contagion of high ideals and scholarly ambition whose influence it has been very delightful to witness.

"The life at Merwick under Mr. Butler and Dean West," he continued in this written report, "has proved another of those innovations which recent years have witnessed at Princeton, which were not experiments, but part of a development along well thought out lines."

The men in their life at Merwick thus praised by Dr. Wilson were just as much shut off from the undergraduates as they will be at the new college which is now building on the golf links. Yet in 1909 and 1910 this very detail of a community life for graduates separated in residence from the undergraduate campus, once praised as wise and fruitful by Woodrow Wilson, became in his attacks and speeches the great evil of the plan, the menace to democracy.

"Will America tolerate the seclusion of graduate students? Will America tolerate the idea of having graduate students set apart?" he asked in his speech to the Pittsburg alumni, April, 1910. "America will tolerate nothing except unpatronized endeavor. Seclude a man, separate him from the rough and tumble of college life, from all the contacts of every sort and condition of men, and you have done a thing which America will brand with its contemptuous disapproval."

Right here at this same meeting of the trustees in December, 1906, the "quad" system entered. It was unlabelled and attracted no attention at the time. No one knew that the appointment by the president of a committee for the "social coordination of the university" meant the revolution of the social scheme of the college life that came out the following June in the "quad" system plan. Hand in hand with President Wilson's report of praise for the graduate school and the opportuneness of Mrs. Swann's $250,000 bequest for a building, Thomson College, he took the first step that was later to result in the proposal of the "quad" system.

The "quad" plan, started at this time, would by reason of its magnitude and its cost, between $2,000,000 and $3,000,000, have effectually displaced for years to come any other project which the trustees could be considering had it been accepted and started in operation. It would sidetrack the graduate college.

The first fault in President Wilson's "quad" system, therefore, in the minds of those Princeton men who threw their support strongly with Dean West had nothing to do with the plan itself. Its primary evil to them was that it was a breach of faith, a broken promise, a moral obligation thrust aside.

Ex-President Grover Cleveland, the chairman of the trustees' committee on the graduate college, was the stanch supporter of Dean West and his plan straight through to his death, in June, 1908. In March, 1907, three months before President Wilson formally proposed his "quad" system, he wrote the following in a letter to Dean West, declaring his entire faith in the graduate college project:

> You know that I as chairman of the committee of university trustees, having the interest of our graduate school in charge, have never wavered in the belief that you as dean of the school and I as chairman of the trustees' committee would realize our high hopes for the complete success of the project. The beginning already made, the palpable necessity of complete accomplishment if Princeton is to reach the point of prestige to which her destiny leads and the absolute certainty that such an establishment as our graduate school will conserve the advanced scholarship which our nation needs in every branch of useful activity do not permit me to doubt that the way will be open for Princeton to occupy with honor and glory the unique field which as a pioneer she has entered upon. Speaking for myself, I want to say to you that I have never been enlisted in a cause which has given me more satisfaction or a better feeling of usefulness.

In June, 1907, came the explosion. President Wilson suddenly let loose the "quad" system plan. Only a part of the trustees had previously had any inkling of it. It was read at the commencement dinners in the clubs to the graduate and upper classmen members.

It was said that the trustees had officially indorsed the plan, not before even suggested. Some believed that the trustess had adopted it. They never voted to adopt it. What they had done in June was to refer the plan back to President Wilson and his committee for further maturing and formulation. As presented by President Wilson it was only a bare skeleton "principle," with no sufficient statement of the main constructive lines it was to follow.

The fundamental evil in the plan, as pointed out by its opponents immediately, was that it was paternalism that destroyed the liberty of the undergraduate by compelling him to live and eat in a given quadrangle of dormitories and dining hall among a certain group of companions selected for him. Another part of the plan was the abolition or absorption of the upper class clubs, representing property valued at between $750,000 and $1,000,000.

Princeton men, friends of President Wilson, admirers of his fine ability and his force, for he was at the height of his popularity just before this time, said in homely phrase: "We'd like to hear more of this plan because of the fact that Wilson has proposed it, but as we see it you can't legislate college students or any others into friendships. They may eat where they are told to eat, but they won't necessarily be friends with a man because they must sit at table with him, whether he be rich or poor, athlete or poller, brilliant or stupid. Groups formed not on wealth or poverty but on like tastes and sympathetic natures will be formed within the quads just as they form with no quads. We'll have social preferences just the same, with the added evils of a man's liberty of choice cut off and the old Princeton split up into a set of separate unknown institutions."

Princeton men resented the charge that followed the "quad" proposal, that the upper class eating club system is undemocratic, especially as compared with other college social systems. They are frank to recognize its faults, but they take pride in it as occasioning far less jealousy and bickering than the usual run of rivalries with fraternity systems. There are fourteen upper class eating clubs, some with costly and others with modest houses. Members eat in the houses, but live in the dormitories on the campus among other men of all the classes. Each of the clubs takes in from twenty to forty men from the two upper classes.

The troublesome freshman and sophomore eating clubs were abolished by the undergraduates several years ago and now the men in both classes eat by classes in commons. At Princeton there is no rushing of freshmen and sub-freshmen to persuade into membership as with the fraternities at other places. Club politics to elect athletic team captains is unheard of in Princeton. Distinctions between the clubs are not heavily drawn. There is no secrecy and nothing of the bitter fraternity fighting of other colleges, for the reason that a man's friends made in freshman and sophomore years are scattered in many clubs.

"Many of my best friends are in other clubs," say the large number of clubmen. And they are glad of it, for it makes for class and college spirit, not club spirit.

There is no outward evidence of club membership, the club hatband has been abolished. In their first two years in the commons dining halls men lay the foundation of a wide acquaintance among all their classmates. This never stops growing. The clubs of the last two years bring men of similar tastes together. The bond of the clubs, however, is not so strong as to interfere with the mingling of the whole class together. The dormitory life of course mingles clubmen and non-clubmen in good fellowship.

Remedy the faults of the social system, said those who saw no real remedy for the social defects of undergraduate life in the "quad" system, by providing for those men in the upper classes now left out of the clubs. There are only a hundred non-clubmen out of 500 in the two upper classes, and a number of these do not care to join clubs. Have more clubs, compel each to take in a full membership each year, build a University Club that should be the centre for the undergraduate organizations and whose eating rooms and grill would give non-clubmen as dignified and agreeable a club home as the rest; these were some of the suggestions that were made and are now being worked over.

There is one man in the freshman class now at Princeton who evidently has not heard that Princeton is aristocratic and full of distinctions based on wealth. He is a bootblack, the son of a Greek cobbler. The lad saved up $350 by shining shoes in a big city and then came to Princeton last fall in the class of 1915. And he is shining shoes to put himself through college. His chair is set up on the campus at the east end of Nassau Hall and he says that he has met with a warm response in the season tickets he has sold. Princeton men admire a man like this and are helping him through.

Another man arrived in Princeton last fall from the West. He had made up his mind that Princeton was the place for him. His total capital was the $20 in his pocket.

"I'm going through," he told the head of the employment bureau.

"You bet you are!" was the reply.

He's been tending gardens and furnaces among other things and is well on his way and happy.

A boy whose parents have millions has as his closest chum a lad who is earning his way through college pressing trousers. Such intimate friends are they that the boy of wealth will hardly go away from Princeton on a trip without the other. Several men in the Ivy Club, the most noted Princeton club, are earning their way through college. In every club there are at least three men, generally more, working their way. A member of one of the most prominent clubs is the manager of the clothes pressing bureau. Edwards Hall, the cheapest dormitory, has a number of clubmen in it.

There is some democracy left in the town too even after the graduate college charges. An editor, a university professor and a Judge of the United States Circuit Court were playing golf on the Princeton course. Along came the butler of one of the prominent men of the town. Golf was his hobby.

"Will you join us?" asked the trio.

He joined the course naturally and at the second hole took the leadership of the party, when he asked:

"How is it now? Is it me and the Judge against the twos o' you?"

Both sides of the "quad" controversy recognize advantages that were contained in the quad system. Friends and foes alike say that freshmen should all eat together in a commons as they had been doing a year before the "quad" system was proposed, and as the sophomores are now doing. Strong opinion on both sides will tell you that in time the clubs may shed of their function as eating places, becoming simply social places.

Their members may then eat in general commons dining halls built on the campus among the dormitories. Both sides also hold that the mixing together of the upper and lower classmen in the dormitories that is coming about more and more, the older influencing the younger, is a good thing. In all of these features, which are similar to points in the quad scheme, there is an element of assignment by university authority, balanced, however, with a great degree of student choice and natural inclination.

President Wilson's sweeping scheme meant the breaking up of the old Princeton and its life along the lines of the four classes. His substitute was a new Princeton with a unit not the class but a quad, comprising men of all four classes. The scheme would make all lines of life in Princeton run not along the lines of the classes but through them, splitting them up and setting them aside. Men said that the several quads would inevitably become dominated by certain kinds of men that would array one quad against the other in a formidable feeling the opposite of democracy unless arbitrarily regulated by university authority.

It was perilous to try this scheme, opponents said, when many of its advantages were otherwise to be obtained by evolution and modification in the class life of Princeton, which would retain the old life and enrich it. It was not the upper class club life attack that the strongest opponents of the quads thought important. They too favored changes in this. It was the whole life and tradition at Princeton they saw in danger of being set aside. Retain and improve the old life, they said; don't throw it away for some hazardous new plan only vaguely formulated.

President Wilson said that his plan was a principle he held out to the alumni for their development, their suggestion. His friends say that he expected its development through gradual stages. But in the startling bomblike method of its proposal, which had much to do with its destruction, most Princeton men saw nothing of this.

Ex-President Cleveland, in the interlocked situation in the summer and fall of 1907 of President Wilson's "quad" system and Dean West's sidetracked graduate college project, was the strong

Continued on Fifteenth Page.